Needham Mr. Dillon

Q. Mr. Dillon, I think we should tell all these people listening to us that there is going to be a great big stampede in Calgary this year, and that we're looking for well over 200,000 people to attend. Bright and early on Monday morning, July the eighth, the band will strike up, and the parade will get going with the cowboys--cowgirls--chuckwagon outfits--Indians--mounted police--and old timers---and Calgary's own stampede week will get under way. How many cowboys and bucking horses do you think will be coming along this year?

A. Well, we had 481 cowboys entered last year, and we're going to have just as many this time. Maybe more. We're expecting Burrell Mulkey, the world's champion bronk rider, from Salmon, Idaho; Guy Cash, the North American bucking horse champion, from Whitefish, Idaho; Sykes Robinson, the Canadian bucking horse champion, from Cochrane, Alberta; Gene Goettler, from De Winton, Alberta, with the chuckwagon outfit that won the title last year; Ike Rude, of Mangum, Oklahoma, last year's North American calf-roping champion; Earl Thode, of Casa Grande, Arizona, former world's champion bucking horse rider; Urban Doan, Jerry Ambler, Dick Cosgrove, Pat McNulty, and a whole bunch of others. Johnny Jordan is coming up from Fort Worth, Texas, to help us with the announcing again.

Now as for livestock, we've lined up about 200 horses for the saddle bucking, and a bunch of wild hot-blooded mares for the bareback and wil horse events. That will be about 300 horses. We've lined up about a hundred cows and a hundred calves, 30 longhorn Highland steers for decorating, and 70 head, with

with Highland blood, for riding. That will be about 600 animals altogether.

Q. Well then, the show looks as if it will be the greatest ever. Everybody likes the parade and the grandstand show and the Indian camp, but the most exciting part of the stampede is what we call the arena part of it . . . the events in which the cowboys hold their own competitions . . . the bucking contests and the steer decorating, and the chuckwagon races and the wild cow milking contest. . . .

A. Yes, I think that's true. This has always been a cattle country, and it still is. And just so long as they raise cattle and horses in Alberta, we'll keep on having the stampede, and cowboys will keep on coming in to be with us, just as they have since we started the stampede, in 1912.

Q. Yes, that's a long time ago . . . 28 years ago. I've often heard about that first stampede, Mr. Dillon. How did they come to put it on in the first place?

A. Well, the first stampede was put on because the big cattlemen thought they were being crowded off the open range. The settlers were coming into Alberta 30 years ago, putting up fences and plowing the land, and the big cattle men thought it was the end of the open range as they had known it. It seemed to them that the cowboy and his horse were passing right out of the picture. So four of them got togethet to talk it over . . . Senator Pat Burns, George Lane, A. E. Cross, and the Honorable Archie McLean.

They decided that they would put on a show in Calgary to perpetuate the life of the range hands, where all the cowboys could meet together and compete with each other. So they made up a purse of $100,000. Then they told the cowboys to come and get it.

Q. Was that just for the cowboys in Alberta?

A. No, they came from all over, from south of the Rio Grande to the Peace River. They came from Texas and Idaho and old Mexico --- every place where cattle ran the range. It was a tremendous success.

Q. When did they hold the second stampede?

A. That was in 1919 -- the Victory stampede. It was a great success, and we've held the stampede every year since 1923.

Q. In other words then, the cowboy and his horse aren't really passing out of the picture at all. A fresh batch of good riders and tough horses keeps coming up . . .

A. Yes, that's true. We still raise cattle and horses in Alberta, and the stampedes keep going on. Just as fast as the old-timers drop out, new cowboys come in. Some of the cowboys we have in our contests now are just young lads, but they're real riders, all of them.

Q. In a way, Mr. Dillon, perhaps they make a better showing than the old-timers who give so much life and color to the stampede. The contests that you put on for the Calgary stampede came very naturally to the old-timers because they were used to the old-time ways on the range.

A. That is a controversy I hesitate greatly to enter into. Not being young myself, my sympathy naturally lies with the old-timers, but at the same time I realize that the style of riding and the conditions under which the contestants operate are entirely different from my days. In the old days, we used to figure out that if a boy stayed on top of his horse without dragging too much leather, he was a pretty fair hand. But today's rules are much more stringent.

For instance, in the saddle bucking contest, the rider has to come out of the chute with both spurs tickling the shoulders of the horse high up. He must also give the horse enough head to give him an opportunity to do his best. He must gig him in front with both spurs for the first five jumps, then he must start coming up high behind. While all this is going on, he must keep one hand high in the air., free from all leather and free from the horse's mane. So, taking it all in all, I'm afraid that as an old range hand myself, I have to give the decision to the present day riders.

Q. I think the chuckwagon race is as good an example of the way the west is changing, Mr. Dillon. You don't see many chuckwagons in Alberta today, do you?

A. No, you don't. But that doesn't stop the chuckwagon race from being the biggest thrill of the stampede. Everybody likes to see those covered wagons roaring along in the dust, with the cookstove hanging away inside.

Q. What's the origin of that race, Mr. Dillon?

A. That goes back to the old days of the open range, when the

boys were going out on the job. They'd arrange for the cook to meet them at a certain place, and he'd have to be there on time with their sow belly and beans. His job was to fill up the chuckwagon and throw the cookstove in it, and be there as quick as he could. You get pretty hungry riding range, and if the cook wasn't there waiting with the meal, the cowboys would get pretty sore. The best cook was the one who got there early and had his pies baked and everything ready when the boys came to meet him.

Q. I suppose that led to a sort of rivalry between the cooks as to which one made the best time out to meet the cowboys?

A. Yes, that's how the chuckwagon races began. One outfit would say their cook had the best horses, and another would say their cook had the best horses, and next thing you know they were putting on a race between the chuckwagons. The race we have now is half a mile. We can't stage it on the open range, so we put barrels in the track, and the chuckwagons have to go around them. There were pelnty of ups and downs on the range, and we put the barrels there to give people an idea of the sort of difficulties the chuckwagon driver would be up against.

Q. Well, then, Mr. Dillon, I think that brings out an important point. All these contests put on at the Calgary stampede are actually based upon fact . . . I mean they are things that actually are done dow, or used to be done, in the cattle business.

A. Yes that's true. You take the bucking horse contests. Horses aren't born in the saddle -- they have to be broken in, and a lot of that breaking in is done right on the ranges. In the olddays, there were two recognized rates of pay for the average

cowboy. If he was willing to ride a rough string of horses, he got a better wage. Well, a cowboy would usually try for the better wage by taking on a rough string, and he'd show how good he was by taking on outlaw horses that nobody else could stay on. Pretty soon you'd get cowboys boasting about the outlaws they could handle, and it would get right down to a contest.

Q. Well, that's the contest you have right now in the stampede, Mr. Dillon. I suppose the idea is to show the cowboy's mastery over a tough horse.

A. Yes, that's the idea. The whole idea of the cowboy events is to show these men's mastery over their horses. The cattle business is their profession, so to speak, and they aim to show how good they are in that particular profession.

Q. Well, how do you know which is the best bucking horse rider? What is the system of judging?

A. That's very carefully done. Every time a cowboy rides a bucking horse at the stampede, three judges are watching him. One judge watches him from the right side, one from the left and the other from behind. There are a lot of rules the cowboy has to observe, and their job is to see he keeps those rules.

Q. You mean it's not enough for him to stay on board?

A. No, he's got to do much more than that, as I explained a minute ago. He's got to keep scratching -- that is, he must keep on aggravating the horse so it will do its darndest to get rid of him.

Q. Do they judge the horses, too?

A. Yes, the horse is judged, and given marks. If it's a real bucking horse, it gets a high mark. The tougher the horse, the better mark the judges give it. The best cowboy is the one who puts up the best ride on the toughest horse. That's how he shows his mastery over horses.

Q. Do you have any trouble getting tough horses?

A. No, we always keep an eye open for them . We watch the smaller stampedes in the P rovince, and we get the worst horses from them for the Calgary show. Sometimes, they're really tough horses; and sometimes they just look tough. We once had a horse called "Wildfire"; he was a very showy horse, but not really a tough one. He bounced just like a rubber ball, and the cowboys got an easy let down each time Wildfire hit the ground. Wildfire never threw a real good man off. On the other hand, there are really tough bucking horses. A really tough horse hits the ground just like a fence post every time he comes down. It takes a good cowboy to stay on board.

Q. I think a lot of people like the wild-cow-milking contest, Mr. Dillon. Most people in the west have milked a dairy cow at some time or another, and they probably found it a tough job at first. But I don't think many of them ever milked a wild cow. Is that contest based on actual fact?

A. Yes, it's all in the day 's work, though it's never been done very often as an actual part of the cattle business. Most of the ranches wouldn't have a dairy cow on the place; they used canned milk all the time. They were in the beef business, and they didn't want any dairy stock mixed up with their herd. Once in

a while they might decide to supply their own milk, and one of the cowboys would have to milk a range cow -- it wasn't an easy job.

Q. It certainly doesn't look easy. How about the calf-roping?

A. That's a very necessary part of the cattle business. In the old days, when there was no fence on the range, the cattle were mixed up as far as ownership went. The cows were branded of course, but the calves were not. The cowboys would rope a calf and drag it out of the herd. Naturally, the cow would follow, and they could tell who owned the calf by looking at the brand on the cow. Then they would put the same brand on the calf. Naturally, there was a rivalry there to see who could drag out the most calves for branding in a given time.

Q. That just leaves one thing to be explained, Mr. Dillon. How about the steer-decorating? A lot of people probably wonder about that, and think it's odd to see a big husky cowboy ride alongside a steer, jump on his back, and put a ribbon on one horn.

A. Well, that's difficult to pin down to actual range work, but I'll try. In the old days, before dehorning became general on the range, you'd often get a cow with sharp horns that became a nuisance to the other cattle. Quite often, there'd be one like that which would keep the others away from the water hole, or there would be other reasons why it might be desirable to dehorn. We'd have to rope that cow and throw it down to saw off the horns. There were various ways of doing that, but in the very early days they used to buldog or mug them. We decided that it would be enough for the cowboy to put a ribbon on one of the cow's horns, to show his agility and mastery over animals. In this contest,

he has to leave his horse, touch the ground with both feet, jump on the steer and put the ribbon on. The man who makes the shortest time is the winner.

Q. I don't think many people realize the wonderful skill shown by these cowboys, Mr. Dillon. Take the calf-roping, for example. The cowboy has to throw a loop from his horse, stop the calf from the saddle, dismount, go down the rope, throw the calf to the ground, then tie three legs securely so the calf can't get up . . . all by himself. I think most of our listeners would want a week to do a job like that. How long does a cowboy take?

A. Well, I suppose the average time is around 25 seconds. But the record time set at Calgary was made by Bob Crosby, a cowboy from New Mexico. He did it in just under 14 seconds.

Q. I guess he would be pretty useful to have around at branding time. Do you think we'll see any records set at this stampede?

A. Well, od course, I don't know the answer to that, but I'd say we have all the groundwork laid for a few new records. The best cowboys in Canada and the States are going to be here, and some of the meanest horses that ever kicked their heels in the air.

Q. Well, then, I think everybody should come along and watch it happen. Can we promise them a real western welcome, Mr. Dillon?

A.

A. We sure can. So long as there's a cow left in Alberta, we'll have our stampede every year; and so long as we have our stampede we can promise them that good western hospitality! Then we must always keep in mind the request made by our government at Ottawa, when dealing with the necessity of bringing into Canada as many American dollars as possible. This can only be done in two ways.

First, by the sale of our surplus produce, and secondly, by selling our scenery, and other attractions, in which the Calgary stampede stands well to the forefront.